



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

RANGE EXPANSION OF WESTSLOPE CUTTHROAT TROUT IN TWELVEMILE CREEK, BIG HOLE RIVER DRAINAGE ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT DECISION NOTICE

**Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Region Three, Bozeman
July 6, 2012**

Proposed Action

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) proposes to introduce westslope cutthroat trout (WCT), a native species to a fishless reach of Twelvemile Creek located upstream of a natural cascade fish barrier. WCT in Twelvemile Creek represent the last remaining non-hybridized population of native cutthroat trout in the Deep Creek drainage. However, the population is declining due to competition from non-native brook trout. The intent of this project is to conserve this local population of WCT by introducing them upstream of the cascade.

Montana Environmental Policy Act

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks is required by the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) to assess significant potential impacts of a proposed action to the human and physical environment. In compliance with MEPA, an Environmental Assessment (EA) was completed for the proposed project by FWP and released for public comment on May 18, 2012.

Public comments on the proposed project were taken for 30 days (through June 18, 2012). The EA was mailed to 27 individuals and groups, and a legal notice was printed in the Montana Standard (Butte) newspaper. A draft EA was posted on the FWP webpage: <http://fwp.mt.gov/publicnotices/>. A total of two comments on this project were received.

Summary of Public Comment

Comment: Skyline Sportsmen's Association: "With a natural barrier already in place and a viable WCT population already in stretches of Twelvemile Creek below the falls it would seem success of the proposed project would be very high, and with minimal costs."

Response: We agree that the most cost effective and immediate way to conserve WCT in Twelvemile Creek is to introduce them upstream of the barrier cascade.

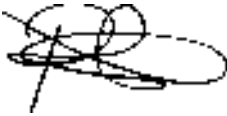
Comment: Jerry DiMarco: “This sounds like a good project, hope it is successful. Will fishing be restricted in the project area after completion of the project? Thank you.”

Response: The fishing regulations will be the same in Twelvemile Creek above the cascade as below which are the same across all streams in the central fishing district. These regulations are: catch and release only for cutthroat trout in rivers and streams. Our hope is that through projects like this and others that we'll eventually be able to change these regulations to allow some harvest of cutthroat trout streams, but this can only occur if we have healthy viable populations. However, for now in most cases cutthroat populations are in tough enough shape that angler harvest would be detrimental to the population. Harvest of cutthroat trout is still allowed in lakes and reservoirs.

Follow-up Comment: Jerry DiMarco: Thank you for your reply. For the record, I'm not asking for more fishing access. I think it would be best to bar access to these recovery areas to minimize the risk of tampering with the WCT habitat...

Decision

It is my decision to go forward with the proposed action of introducing WCT to the fishless reach of Twelvemile Creek upstream of the cascade fish barrier, based on the Environmental Assessment, public comment, and benefits and risks associated with this project. I find there to be no significant impacts on the human and physical environments associated with this project. I therefore conclude that the Environmental Assessment is the appropriate level of analysis, and that an Environmental Impact Statement is not required.



Patrick J. Flowers
Region Three Supervisor